

DOAS Loss Control Bulletin

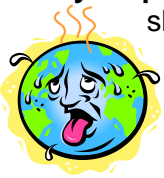
March 2016

Topic of the Month...Heat Stress



Most of Georgia is ready for spring and summer at this point. With this heat comes the potential for heat related injuries. The CDC reports over 7,000 Heat Stress illnesses and over 600 deaths from heat annually in the USA. As we get older, it is harder to regulate our body temperature and dehydration. The goal is to recognize the hazards and symptoms of heat stress disorders and stop them before they occur. Supervision needs to use the following steps (**P.A.S.T.**) to prevent heat related injuries: **Plan** for the heat, provide **Access to Water**, provide **Shade** for break areas, and provide proper **Training** to prevent heat related injuries. Although summer heat is the largest cause of heat distress; it may also occur when workers are exposed to confined areas such as firefighting, shipboard spaces with limited ventilation, or any confined area involving welding or cutting.

Symptoms: The major heat stress injuries and illnesses are: **Heat Rash, Heat Cramps, Heat Syncope, Heat Exhaustion, and Heat Stroke.** The symptoms of heat stress disorders are very slow to start, but increase in intensity if precautions are not taken. The initial symptoms are mild and usually involve headaches, thirst, and tiredness. *Warning signs of heat exhaustion* are heavy perspiration, fatigue and weakness, muscle and body ache, headache, nausea, rapid heartbeat, confusion, loss of consciousness, and vomiting (with or without loss of consciousness).



Heat stress can quickly move to heat stroke, a life-threatening medical emergency, when the body's natural cooling system breaks down and causes the body's core temperature to rise and overheat the brain. Some of the symptoms of heat stroke are immense thirst, severe headaches, disorientation, dry/hot skin (no sweating) and possibly collapse. Adjusting to these factors and/or controlling them reduce the chance of heat stress. Six main factors are involved in causing heat stress:

<u>Humidity</u>	<u>Air Movement</u>	<u>Temperature</u>
<u>Clothing</u>	<u>Activity Level</u>	<u>Radiant Temperature of the Surroundings</u>

People who are overweight, physically unfit, suffer from heart conditions, drink too much alcohol or are not acclimated to the temperature are at greater risk of heat stress. They should seek and follow medical advice.

Treatment/Prevention – The following items may aid in combating heat stress disorders:

1. Employees accustomed to working in the heat are better candidates for job assignments where heat stress disorders may occur.
2. Until employees acclimate to the high temperatures, allow frequent cool down breaks.
3. Employees should be rotated from the exposure area to a non-exposure area on a regular basis to help in avoiding heat stress symptoms.
4. Employees should be encouraged to drink plenty of fluids (water, Gatorade, Powerade, etc.). Employees should not drink any carbonated beverages (Coke, Pepsi, etc.) as these drinks only increase dehydration and give a false sense of being properly hydrated. Also, the use of alcohol the evening before the work shift, can lead to dehydration even before heat exposure.

If an employee appears to be suffering from heat stress disorder, remove him or her from the heat and provide a cool, shaded place to rest. If the employee is disoriented or non-responsive, call for medical attention immediately. To get the "Real Feel" wet bulb temps go to OSHA web site and down the App. **Remember, there is no better cure than prevention.**

Thanks for your time. Let's work together to make Georgia a safer place to work.

DOAS Risk Management Services Division Loss Control Office